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# President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Issues

Following is a transcript of President Reagan's news conference last night in Washington, as recorded by The New York Times:

## OPENING STATEMENT

Good evening, please be seated. I have an opening statement.

I want to say a few words tonight about three important issues that I have now before the Congress. We've returned in government spending, and with Gramm-Rudman we've got a fresh start in 1987 and even lower tax rates, even more jobs, and even stronger growth.

Finally, there is the upcoming vote on aid to the Nicaraguan freedom fighters. Congress must understand the urgency of the situation in Central America. Delay is deadly and plays right along with the Communist game plan because while we have tied our own hands the Soviets, Cubans and Libyans haven't tied theirs. With over a billion dollars of support and some of the most fearsome weapons in the Soviet arsenal, the Communist strategy is simple: Hold off America as long as possible in the hope they can destroy all opposition before help arrives.

It's time for an up-and-down vote on from Nicaragua, an up-and-down vote on whether the United States is going to stop Soviet expansionism on the American mainland while the price is still too low. The risks are still not too great. We must act now in a bipartisan way to do the right thing. The right thing in Nicaragua and protect the national security of the United States.

Now, Helen, it's your turn.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### Arms Treaty

Q. Mr. President, your decision to tear up the SALT II treaty at the end of the year has caused great consternation among the allies, among members of Congress on both sides of the aisle, among those who fear that you are creating a more dangerous world. My question is, is this decision irreversible? And if so, how can we be sure?

A. I, Helen, I have to say that I can understand why they would be distressed with the way the news has been carried, but let me go back to what the situation really is.

First of all, this treaty was signed seven years ago, was never ratified — so, it was more than seven years ago, I guess — but for seven years there was supposed to be a balance of arms, a restraint and this observation of the — this observance of the treaty's terms. And for seven years this country has been doing that.

The Soviet regime, for seven years, has been violating the restraints of the treaty.

I found it necessary to — or advisable to do away with the two Russian submarines as we launched the Trident but that, I had to keep within the bounds of what we launched the Trident but not — rather did keep within the constraints of the SALT II agreement. That wasn't the reason. Had there been no SALT agreement, we would have done away with the submarines because — or dismantled them — because of the cost and the military value of the submarines.

But then what I said was that before we reached another point where this might be an issue, we had to move months away which has to do with the arming of the 131st B-52 with a new air-launch cruise missile. And in the interim period, I said that we could not go on unilaterally observing the constraints while the Soviet Union violated them and gained a greater superiority over us and that we were going to be bound from now on by the necessities of the arms race. We're not seeking to achieve superiority over them but we're certainly not going to let them go on increasing their superiority over us.

I said because we have these several months before this moment comes up that we were going to our utmost since they themselves have talked of arms reduction. And we were going to do our utmost to see if we couldn't involve them in replacing the SALT Treaty with a new treaty that was never ratified as I said, but second of all would no longer be in power if it had been ratified because it was stated for a limited period of time if that we could replace that with a realistic program of arms reduction which has been my goal ever since I've been here.

Now we have the first Soviet leader to my knowledge that's ever been so clearly spoken of reducing nuclear weapons and we want to follow up on that.

### Congressional Critics

Q. It sounds like you are going to tear it up, Mr. President.

Do you agree with Richard Perle who branded as Soviet supporters, members of Congress who want to keep you within the limits of this treaty?

A. I'm not going to make any comment on anyone who wants to tear it up — but I did find it rather strange that some of the senators who spoke very critically of me without really understanding what it is that I've done to explain about this, some of them were members of the Senate when they refused to ratify the treaty to begin with. The treaty was really nothing but the legitimizing of an arms race. It didn't do anything to control or limit the number of weapons. So I was always hostile to that particular treaty because it did not reduce weapons and that's what we're going to do. But again, as I say, the Soviets have an opportunity to meet us now with regard to solve the very same problem that we've been proposing — arms reduction. And we will observe the constraints to the same extent as the Soviet Union does, and we can't go on unilaterally observing this while they take off on their own with the violations that they've already made and probably more to come.

### Future of Shuttle

Q. Mr. President, NASA is awaiting your decision on how to replace the Challenger spacecraft. Could you tell us tonight how you would finance the fourth orbiter? And if you can't tell us that, could you explain what's holding up your decision?

A. Well for one thing, we're studying the report that we've received and there are many things that have to be decided. There is a backlog now of space cargo that is supposed to be there and we have the problem of determining whether we shouldn't increase the number of unmanned launchers for many of these things that could put them in space. And then see where we can come with the belief that we have the money and I think we do — with the shuttle program, but how soon we can get that could vary in the meantime should we emphasize more of the unlaunched to get to move on that backlog that we have of cargo that needs to get into space. I don't have an answer for you on this except that, yes, I think we should go forward with what we have.

Q. A follow-up, sir. Would that, for the shuttle, would you insist that the constraints of the SALT II agreement be maintained? Or would you still recommend the Rogers commission when it is built?

A. I couldn't answer that question in the midst of studying that now that we've just received it, so I can't answer anything as specific as that about that.

### Nicaragua Policy

Q. I have a two-part question, sir. You've left no doubt through your public statements that we intend not to permit Nicaragua to become another Communist Cuba or a Soviet satellite. But the United States if the contract is defeated by any means whatever, is a naval quarantine a possibility?

A. I couldn't answer that question without comment on anything that might be further actions for us because I don't think you could do that without forming them of anything we have not, and we have not. At the moment comes beyond aiding the Contras because we think that — I've got to stop using that word, that was the Sandinistas title for them and I don't like doing anything they're doing — so the freedom fighters we believe with all the information that we have that they are capable of at the very least applying sufficient leverage that for a negotiating table for a settlement. We would prefer that over a unilateral action, if that can be done. We know that there are thousands of recruits that are waiting to join the freedom fighters, and they need the weapons and ammunition and so forth for them.

### Effect on Summit

Q. Another part of the question is this week, in a speech you likened Mr. Gorbachev to Castro, Ararat and Qaddafi, and I'd like to ask what effect you think this statement will have on future relations with the Soviet Union in a possible summit. I'm talking about the Reagan-Romney summit.

A. Yes, but I didn't think I lumped him in with them.

Q. In the speech.

A. I certainly think it was a bad choice of words, because I didn't mean to do that, because, as I said, he is the first Russian leader to my knowledge, that has ever voiced the idea of reducing, and even eliminating nuclear weapons. And he's been a good fellow, because believe me, I don't put him in the same category.

### Ruling on Abortion

Q. Mr. President, with the Supreme Court's decision today allowing women to have an abortion, would another Supreme Court decision, which your Administration let this be the last, would you let us go back to look for another case to press your point on this matter?

A. Now wait a minute, let me again here. I think I was still answering Jerry's question.

Q. The Supreme Court decided to

## PRESIDENT SPEAKS TO YOUNG ASTRONAUTS: President Reagan addressing the Young Astronauts of America yesterday at the Smithsonian Institution's Air and Space Museum.

day to not interfere with a woman's right to have an abortion. Is your Administration going to pick another case to fight this position or are you going to let it stand as the law of the land?

A. We're going to see — if I interpret the decision right of the Court, their decision was not to what we were trying to accomplish but the fact that evidently the regulations in H.R. that we asked for were based on that previous bill that had to do with discrimination against the handicapped and they, the Court, said they thought that this was putting the Federal Government — we were getting into something that properly was the province of the state and all. So what we have to do is look for what are the proper way we can do this.

Because I feel very strongly that we're talking about a human right. And the case that prompted this entire act was one in which the determination was made that this life is to be taken away and yet it isn't done as you would with an animal, it isn't done with a mercantile, it's done with a human being. So I just don't think that — if our Constitution means anything, it means that we, the Federal Government, are entrusted with preserving life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Well, where do we draw the line? Can we say to someone, "It's all right for you to have a child, but you choose and dispose of this human life, and for whatever reason?" And I just don't think that's the way we're finished with this problem at all.

### Soviet Superiority

Q. Mr. President, if I could pursue the questions on your decision on the SALT II treaty? On the one hand you're saying that the Soviets have continued to increase their superiority over us. On the other hand you said that the treaty did not constrain either side in terms of the arms race, as one of the reasons you were not for it. If yet and still was one in the same time, when we've had a massive buildup, the Reagan defense buildup. Which way is it? Have the Soviets been able to increase superiority over this period of time? Or has the treaty not been able to stop them?

A. No, it hasn't been able to. The treaty, actually, sets limits, as for example what one new type of weapon now that you could develop that didn't exist, and they have developed two instead of one, and this was a violation. It also sets numbers and figures so that it was a restraint on the extent of just not an all-out arms race with no limit on the way you could progress. But when you say about achieving, which way is it? Have the Soviets been able to increase superiority over this period of time? Or has the treaty not been able to stop them?

Q. If I could just follow that up through.

A. At the same time your own arms control director, Mr. Adams, has said that the Soviet violations have not had any great military significance. And I think the possibility now, since the violations themselves which have been disputed by some people as to their significance, what is the possibility that by abandoning the treaty now, which is, as you just admitted, has some limited significance in providing some degree of predictability, that we won't go into a complete arms race now? What's to replace SALT at least for now? And why make this decision now?

A. I didn't make it now. I said we've got several months here in which we're going to try to involve them in the treaty. They're not even talking about that. And this is a definite arms reduction program. This is the only thing that makes sense in the world and I've been talking about this since 1980 and I said I was sick and tired of arguments that just said, well we'll only go at this pace in order to increase the number of weapons. Let's get around to getting rid of them as much as we can.

### Hunger in America

Q. Sir, that's true, thank you, for remembering.

A. Couple of weeks ago you said that the problem of the hungry people in

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America is not due to the fact that they don't have food and the ability to get food, it's that they don't know where to get it. And some poor people we talked to at the time said you're blaming the hungry people for being hungry. You're putting the blame on them.

A. Well, I don't know who those people were, and I do have to say that I think there are people who lack the information, people out in the country, that maybe don't know and we've had plenty of evidence of that. But the simple truth of the matter is, we are spending on nutrition more than we have ever spent before, more than \$3 billion over and above what was spent in 1981. \$18.6 billion I think it is. And that is being spent on our food program. But in the interim, during this same time that we've been increasing the private sector has gone all in programs all over the country of meals for the hungry. Today the Federal Government has gone all in and it's \$3 million meals a day and that doesn't count all the private agencies that are putting to sleep or to feed. And I think it's reasonable to believe that people are starving in this country because food isn't available. I just, as I say, I think that in many instances the people just don't know where or how to go about it and at the same time I find it difficult also to find any cases of starvation and undernourishment.

### Food Aid Program

Q. But sir, if that is the problem, public education, why then did you cut out the one Federal program that did just that — educate hungry people, educate rural poor, educate elderly shut-ins how to get food assistance? I was there and your Administration cut it out.

A. Because it was a case of — that was a case of simply food stamps and that's what the program was. I think most people are aware of food stamps and the neighbors are doing it in many cases and if they haven't done it yet and this was one in which they had us literally going door to door, knocking on the door to tell people to become eligible for food stamps. And we thought it was a waste, that we'd rather buy more food stamps and pay for more food stamps than to pay for the bureaucracy to do a thing like that.

### Weapons Decision

Q. Mr. President, you've just said that you really haven't made the SALT decision yet. And I think there's a lot of confusion as to exactly where we stand on the SALT decision. Remember, we're still playing cat and mouse with the Soviets on the SALT decision or are you going to dismantle another submarine and the way that there's no way that you are going to stop on SALT?

A. Well, Leslie, you're asking something yes, we will have a plane coming up to be armed with a cruise missile that would put us to that extent beyond the constraints or the limitation. Now we've got several months before we reach that point. We've got several months in which to see if the Soviet Union — we have taxed them over and over again with regard to their violating the constraints. Now on that basis we're going to see if we cannot persuade them to join in the things they're talking about — arms control — or arms reduction. And if nothing is done then we'll make the decision with regard to that plane.

### Missile Proposal

Q. There are reports that today in Geneva the Soviets made a new proposal on reducing long-range strategic missiles. Is this the kind of proposal you've been looking for and has it changed your opinion of what you're going to do on SALT?

A. I can't comment on it because of the confidentiality of the discussions there in Geneva. But yes, as of today we have received this proposal, and now we're going to see what it is and what they have in it. Sam?

### Challenger Liability

Q. Mr. President, the Rogers commission detailed a series of actions and inactions leading up to that shuttle disaster. Of individuals who knew that the O-rings had a problem but did nothing about it, and in the last 24 hours before the shuttle was launched, engineers from Thiokol saying it's unsafe to launch, don't launch, but of presence being put on Thiokol to reverse it. And yet William Rogers seems to

under way right now to see if that's true, because he absolutely has sworn that if it is he's going to correct it because he doesn't want any discrimination either.

Q. What will you do to insure that these things are carried out?

A. That they are what?

Q. That they are carried out?

A. Well, because I feel as strongly as he does about that, I'm going to be watching this very carefully. I don't want any hint or sign in our Administration that there is any kind of discrimination of that kind. And I think I've got a record that should make you willing to believe that, because as a Governor in California I eliminated a kind of quiet discrimination that had been an unfair balance in employment, and ended up appointing more members of the minority communities to executive and policy-making positions than all the previous Governors of California put together. So yes, I'm going to read hard on this, but I have great confidence in the Secretary of Agriculture, because he was doing this in California at the same time that I was Governor.

### Offer in Geneva

Q. Mr. President, the Warsaw Pact are said to be offering to withdraw a million of their troops that face us in the West. For those of us with families in Europe, that sounds like a lot. I know that you always like to deal with these offers in the confidentiality of Geneva but isn't it perhaps a move, bearing in mind that nothing seems to have come out of Geneva for over a year, to go with an offer like this, run with it and see what happens?

A. You mean the offer that has just been given in Geneva?

Q. Yes.

A. Well, as I say, we — there have been offers and we have made counter-offers, much in the same thing and with pretty much the same end result as to numbers of weapons. And where we — where the difficulties seem to come in is the Soviet Union and the United States have somewhat different mixes of weapons that we believe are essential to well, for their we believe theirs is based more on an offensive nature and we believe ours is based more on a deterrent idea. And so sometimes we run into difficulties then in reconciling some of the means of getting the same number of warheads being eliminated. This has kept us from having an agreement so far.

Now this last agreement has come in and we don't know yet until we see it carefully is it a response to one of our counter-offers, does it in some way change their — some of their proposals and bring us closer to a negotiated position? And this is what we want more than anything. So you can depend on it that we're going to be going to make every effort. But it must be fair and balanced; it must not be an agreement in which one side is trying to maintain or increase an advantage over the other.

Q. Sir, if I may, in our society if an employer of a train falls asleep a switch, and we pursue him for negligence, if bus drivers — all through our society when people do things — even though they don't mean to kill anyone, as you've said in this case, they're brought into court if there's evidence that they've been negligent in some sort of criminal fashion. Why should we exempt them from that kind of just measure?

A. Well, let me — Sam, let me plead waiting until we see the entire report, until we get a chance to read all of the testimony and everything else before making a decision. We put a man in there that I don't suggest but they speak publicly about a possible date and that was wrong for us because of the coming political campaign. But we still — and I still — believe that he wants a summit and I want a summit. I'd better spread around here somewhere.

### European Tourism

Q. Thank you, Mr. President and I will have a follow. Immediately after the SALT decision, you were particularly grateful to Prime Minister Thatcher for her help in allowing the United States to let airplanes take off from U.K. Since then, American tourists have been staying away from England and Europe in droves and Mr. Thatcher has made a personal plea for Americans and their dollars to come back to the continent. Do you think it's safe in Europe for Americans to return and will you tell Americans whether they ought to go overseas this summer?

A. You've asked me a very tough one in my position, with what I know about the dangers throughout the world. I certainly don't want to be quoted as advocating a tourist melé in the face of the world the way it is, but I'm going to be rather bold and just tell you that our Ambassador recently had a little talk or something that was carried in The Los Angeles Times and that he said that he believes that London was probably one of the safest cities in the world, and that he saw no reason for anyone to be fearful of that. Well, I have not argued with him on his making that point.

### Security Precautions

Q. My follow then is that we also read about the extraordinary security precautions that are going to be taken for the Statue of Liberty festivities July 4. Are you concerned that perhaps that's a pretty delectable message target?

A. Yes, but I also have a great deal of confidence in our security people. And I can see where they would think that that would be a very inviting target for the Government. What are the risks and think that they might be able to embarrass us that way.

### Discrimination

Q. Mr. President, the Agriculture Department has been severely criticized for its treatment of minorities in employment and service delivery — this, despite your saying that you would not tolerate discrimination in the Federal Government. What are you going to do about the Agriculture Department?

A. Yes, it's already been done by the Secretary of Agriculture. He's heard these allegations also, and as I understand it, there were allegations with regard to not being as fair as they should be with regard to women employment and on a racial basis, to black and to the farm and the various agencies of the Agriculture Department — an investigation is

### Mexican Debt

Q. Our Federal Reserve Chairman Volcker made an unannounced trip to Mexico this week to discuss the country's financial problems. Are you worried that Mexico might unilaterally default on its debt or totally default on foreign debts?

A. Well, I think this is a possibility not only Mexico but other countries that are having these debt problems that are based on the high interest rates of the past years. And I think we're obviously we'd like to be of help to them within the framework of the agreements that we've reached with Secretary Baker. And we want to be of help as much as we can. Mexico is not our neighbor. Our neighbors are linked on many fronts and so we want to be of as much help as we can. And that was the reason for his trip. It's over already?

Why don't you ask questions that can be answered yes or no?